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ABSTRACT

School-community collaborations are developing in many cities to respond to the escalating needs of minority and other disadvantaged students. School districts in New York City have developed collaborative programs with health care services, youth agencies, neighborhood family service centers, community organizations and parent groups. Critics argue that schools compound their academic ineffectiveness by attempting to meet their students' non-instructional needs. Supporters argue that schools have no choice because effective teaching and learning is impossible when students' pre-instructional needs remain unattended, and that schools are the only institutions societally positioned to mandate and achieve the daily attendance of all children. Advantages include the following: (1) provision of more extensive student services; (2) focus on school improvement; (3) reduction of the gap between school culture and home-neighborhood culture; and (4) development of a new comprehensive community-based institution with the local school and its instructional focus at the core of a wide range of services. Problems include the following: (1) district-level management's lack of experience; (2) a tendency to work only with traditional agencies to the exclusion of minority group organizations and agencies offering controversial services; (3) power struggles between administrators and collaborators; (4) disparities between school-level implementation and district-level decisions; (5) institutional rigidity; (6) a too narrow focus on vocationalism; and (7) the danger of creating an atmosphere of clientism. (FMW)

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SCHOOL-COMMUNITY COLLABORATIONS:

DILEMMAS AND OPPORTUNITIES

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A neighborhood hospital is currently working with my Brooklyn school district to set up adolescent health clinics in two of our middle schools. Another local hospital staffs several schools with nurse practitioners who provide primary care, health education, screening and referral. An optometric clinic offers vision testing and corrective training, while a downtown Brooklyn psychiatric clinic offers in-school crisis intervention and family counseling. A neighborhood family service center provides counseling, case management, tutoring and recreation to hundreds of our middle school students judged at risk of dropping out of high school, and also runs an alternative high school for students who've dropped out of our neighborhood high school.

Early morning drop-off programs and after-school recreation programs are offered in schools throughout our district through collaborations with a variety of providers -- youth-serving agencies, neighborhood family service centers, community organizations, even a parent cooperative. Many of these after-school programs offer homework help, tutoring, counseling, peer discussion groups and career preparation. All our schools provide breakfast and lunch for the more than 80% of our 19,000 students currently eligible.

School districts throughout New York City are collaborating in similar service efforts because they face escalating levels of student need. Schools Chancellor Quinones' annual reports indicate that "more than one fourth of the city's children are supported by public assistance, one third live in single-parent families, and well over half of the mothers with school-aged children work." New York City's students are almost half of New York State's special education student population, more than three quarters of the state's limited English proficient students, and half of the state's students in need of basic skills remediation. Approximately 20% of the system's almost one million students transfer into, out of or within the

city's schools each year, and an increasing number of those transferring students are homeless children being shuttled through shelters and welfare hotels.

These needs will get worse. In *All One System*, Harold L. Hodgkinson estimates that only 41 of every 100 children born today will reach age 18 within a two-parent family. Since an increasing percentage of all school-age children will be Black and Hispanic during the coming decades, continuation of systemic patterns of housing segregation, job discrimination and institutional racism will produce a school population increasingly disadvantaged by poverty and the daily struggle for economic survival. What Hodgkinson calls a "an epidemic increase in the number of children born outside marriage" will be particularly costly to the 50% of such children born to teenage mothers. Since such mothers often experience inadequate prenatal care and poor nutrition, their children are frequently born prematurely. The resulting low birth weights often lead to major health problems and major learning difficulties when these children reach school. All these problems are compounded by the growing numbers of latch-key students forced to cope with after-school isolation while their parents, often women heads of household, work long hours to insure the family's survival.

Faced with these critical levels of need, many school systems are scrambling to incorporate the resources of other service institutions. Yet there is a consistently critical argument which holds that schools compound their academic ineffectiveness by attempting to meet students' non-instructional needs. Schooling critics and school people alike have long maintained that asking schools to solve larger societal problems -- poverty, segregation, discrimination, family fragmentation -- dissipates schooling's resources, overloads school personnel and ultimately reduces schooling's effectiveness in its critical task of developing the academic skills and intellectual capacities of all its students.

The standard answer to this criticism that schools are being asked to do too much (with far too little) is that schools have no choice, because effective teaching and learning is impossible when students' needs for adequate nutrition, health care and emotional support remain unattended. Though schools cannot control the level of need their students bring to the school house door, they can attempt to alleviate those pre-instructional needs once students enter. Moreover, schools are the only institutions societally positioned to respond to the increasing needs of young people, because they alone can mandate and achieve the daily presence of (almost) all our children.

But to argue that schools have no choice is not to argue that they can effectively meet this escalating level of need. Because schoolpeople experience, daily, the inadequacy of their available responses, and because many schoolpeople are indeed overburdened and overwhelmed, school systems are increasingly turning to public and private service providers, and to business and industry, to develop additional resources to meet students' needs. In pre-school and after-school care, health care, substance abuse, pregnancy prevention, job and career preparation and transition to college, school systems are developing collaborations with a wide range of agencies and organizations to offer new forms of assistance to students. (In many instances the agencies themselves have initiated such collaborative efforts, precisely because schools provide such critical access to students in need.)

The collaborative efforts have obvious potential for leveraging and directing more extensive resources to students. The addition of non-school professionals also alleviates some of the burdens on teachers and administrators, allowing them to focus more effectively on the school's academic program. But such collaborations can also contribute to making schools more responsive institutions. When

differently trained adults address the health, family and social service needs of students, their perceptions often challenge traditional schooling assumptions. Such collaborations can make unavoidable a presentation of the school's strengths and weaknesses to the scrutiny of independent outside observers.

Moreover, when neighborhood and community agencies are involved in school-service collaborations, the gap which often exists between school culture and home-neighborhood culture, especially when racial and ethnic diversity is involved, can be somewhat reduced by the active presence of a community-based service providers within the school. Finally, these collaborative efforts suggest a direction for the institutional development which might meet young people's needs more effectively -- a comprehensive community-based institution, with the local school and its instructional focus at the core of a wide range of services. Pre-school and after-school care and recreation, tutoring and homework help, nutrition, health care, family support, counseling, pregnancy prevention and job, college and career preparation could all be provided by a wide range of service institution, business/industry groups and community organizations, all working collaboratively with and within local schools.

Initial efforts to develop such joint service provision are underway in school districts throughout the country, and their progress has spotlighted a number of problems. These efforts are usually negotiated at the school district level, yet many district superintendents and administrators have little experience of structuring and managing such cross-institutional collaborations. Since the choice of which service agencies to involve is often complex and highly political, administrators may be tempted to play safe by working with traditional agencies whose capacity to meet student need may be less effective than more activist, flexible, grass-roots organizations. Therefore Black and Hispanic organizations which

attempt to energetically represent their constituencies, and groups such as family planning agencies offering controversial services, may often find themselves excluded by overly cautious district administrators.

Other administrators may be so unaccustomed to sharing control and direction that their almost instinctive attempts to monopolize leadership and resources frustrate and eventually alienate their collaborators. Some districts may deliberately set up collaborative efforts to fail, in order to prove that school systems know best. Other districts may, through inexperience or administrative incompetence, minimize the tasks involved, assign responsibility to inadequately prepared personnel, and generally downplay the importance of the effort. Conversely, some districts may so strongly stress immediate results that they oversell the collaborative and overburden its efforts with expectations that cannot be met.

Since these collaborative efforts are usually negotiated by the district but implemented at local schools, another range of problems can surface at each participating school. School staff may not share the district-level commitment to collaborate, and may view service providers as intruders. In most schools there is always some predictable and understandable defensiveness to overcome. No school is perfect, and most urban schools contain a variety of staff, administrative and resource shortcomings no one is anxious to reveal. Moreover, schoolpeople often fear outsiders misperceive the enterprise of schooling, the nature and characteristics of students and the institutional necessities which structure each school's particular climate and rituals. Some schoolpeople fear that opening the school to the work of non-instructional personnel compromises the school's academic mission. Others resent the resource disparities between what public policy makes available for schooling and the financing of other service collaborators.

There are also institutional rigidities which limit the capacity of school-people to provide the conditions service providers request. Confidentiality requirements, for example, may set clear limits on access to students, contact with their parents or availability of student records. Allocation formulas, funding restrictions, programming requirements and even the terms of union contracts may limit the resources, time and personnel which schools can make available for collaborative efforts. Increasing curriculum requirements imposed by state legislatures or state education departments may further limit the non-instructional time available in even an extended school day.

Constraints and limiting assumptions operating on the non-school side of these collaborations can also create difficulties. Business and industry groupings involved in a wide range of school-to-work, job training and career preparation may push for too narrow and too vocationally-oriented skills training, thereby leeching the academic curriculum and distorting the school's mission to develop the potentials for self-realization and effective exercise of democratic citizenship in each student. Service provision can often create an environment of clientism, in which students are seen as individual victims and treated in ways which reinforce passivity, dependency and quietism. Finally, most collaborations may be too easily perceived, by schoolpeople and outsiders alike, as solely service efforts which never consider the limitations of the school's core, the instructional program. Yet, in too many schools, the failures of the instructional program create new academic and identity needs which compound and intensify the pre-instructional needs students originally bring to school.

Therefore current attempts at collaboration suggest both the problems and possibilities inherent in this new effort to expand the range of services schools can provide. Employing the framework that Jim Cummins has developed in a recent

Harvard Educational Review article, effective collaborations have clear potential to encourage schools that **empower** students, particularly disadvantaged students, through their capacity to open up systems, challenge embedded traditional assumptions, expose shortcomings and involve community representatives in the daily life of the school. But less effective collaborations can also reinforce schools which **disable** students, particularly minority students, through clientism, vocationalism and the continuation of a range of mechanisms which teach students their (delimited) place and force them to maintain it.

The vision which the most effective current efforts at collaboration suggest is the transformation of the neighborhood school into a comprehensive youth-serving organization, directed and staffed by a wide range of genuinely representative community-based agencies and groups, supplementing the school's instructional mission by effectively meeting the full range of students' non-instructional needs. But it will take considerable political and organizational effort, by schoolpeople, service providers and community agencies committed to this vision, to shape current efforts at collaboration to those ends.